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Mexico to Texas

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"ON the border" has become a phrase as familiar to our ears as "somewhere in France", although, thank God, containing far less of tragedy. Our study of Spanish-speaking Americans is closely linked with that of our neighbors across the line, and much knowledge of what they are and what they need on this side of the Rio Grande may be gathered by learning of the people from whom they, or their forbears, have come.

"The border"—What is it? Where is it? How came it there? The answers, as revealed by history, are far from creditable to the United States.

Aboriginal Mexico included a large area to the north of the present Mexican boundaries. Its most highly-civilized inhabitants were the Aztecs, a people whose few remains in engineering and architecture are wonders even in our day.

The next chapter in Mexican history, that of the Spanish Conquest, under Cortes, is a tale of blood and death—the death not only of persons but of civilization. Treachery and cruelty marked the dealings of Spain with the natives, as in Cuba and Porto Rico. Taking full advantage of a legendary tale that one day a race of people would come to Mexico from the land of the rising sun, the Spaniards heaped insult and wrong upon those who had welcomed them cordially and generously.

Early in the nineteenth century, revolution broke out, but was quelled by the Spanish rulers—quelled, but its spirit was not destroyed. It broke out again and again, until "nothing was left to Spain of the brightest jewel in her crown save the cities of Vera Cruz, Perok and Acapulco."

The United States of Mexico was established, but lasted only a few months, intrigue and scheming resulting in the proclamation of the latest leader of the revolution as Emperor of Mexico. Internal strife continued, and then came the French, with armed demand for the settlement of French claims.

In 1820 a grant of land in Texas had been made by Mexican authority to Moses Austin, of Missouri. By 1833, in defiance of Mexican law, there were 20,000 men from the United States in Texas, and they decided to separate from Mexico and become independent — the Lone Star State.

The United States government acquiesced, but urged claims for settlement by Mexico in both Texas and California. When Texas was admitted to the Union, in 1845, feeling became so bitter that war broke out between the two countries—"a war that should never have been undertaken", writes a historian. "That the government of the United States was in the wrong is the verdict of all civilized nations."

At the close of the Mexican War, New Mexico and Upper California were ceded to the United States. "No one has attempted to explain by what right Texas was annexed to the Union after the Sabine River had been formally settled upon as the boundary between Mexico and the United States."

So much for the past. The present is too near at hand for historical visioning. The border? It lies along the Rio Grande, from Brownsville to El Paso, and west to the Pacific. It is there because of events reflecting little credit on either nation, though it is charitable to say that Mexico, down-trodden, uneducated, blood-drenched, is more to be pitied than blamed.

What next, no one can say. But out of the history thus hurriedly sketched, some things stand out clearly.

There are but two classes in Mexico—the "high-born" and the hopelessly poor — and by both manual labor is considered degrad-

ing. Merely crossing the line does not change this conception, and it forms one of the great difficulties in our industrial schools. But the necessities of life have forced the people into unwilling labor, and there are "few classes of laborers who do more work for less money than the Mexican peon."

The Spaniards took from the country, in leaving it, all they could "get away with", and the promoters of each succeeding tide of revolution have followed their example.

Lack of schools has produced gross ignorance. Mistreatment and systematic circulation of falsehoods have made the people bitter against the "gringoes". A recent writer says, "The American soldiers have won the friendship of the Mexicans who have had a chance to get a real acquaintance with them. They have won this friendship by constant fair dealing in their relations with the natives, by liberally disseminating American gold in return for the goods of the country, and by touching the imagination of the simple-minded children of nature who make up the population of rural Mexico. That is the point that impressed me most. The Americans . . . have made it interesting to be good. . . . Not as a punitive expedition, but as a campaign of education, General Pershing's trip through Mexico is bearing its richest fruit."

One of our own workers "on the border" says of the refugee Mexicans, "The sacrifice is great to leave a comfortable little home, surrounded by friends and all that is familiar, to go to a strange land with strange customs and language. It would be hard enough if this change were made from choice, but when one is compelled to flee for life and safety, taking only a few personal belongings that may be tied in a bundle, each step of the way is filled with fear.

"Although the boundary line is only the Rio Grande, which may be crossed at any place the greater part of the year, it is so well guarded that one must go only to certain places, there often to undergo treatment at a

disinfectant station, and perhaps to lose one's few possessions for the lack of money to pay duty. Thus the refugees arrive on this side without money, or extra clothing, often, and with no place to stay.

"Rents are exorbitant and work hard to get, so the people are compelled to live in close quarters, several families, frequently, in one small room, with a single window, or perhaps none at all.

"Though in a land of safety they are not free from fear, for they have been taught to distrust the Americans, and to believe they will suffer at the hands of American soldiers as they do from Mexican soldiers.

"I am glad to add that they take on American ways quite readily, and improve in their ways of living as fast as conditions under which they live will permit."

From Mexico—into Texas—what then? The answer to that question will be vitally affected by the support given to our Home Missionary work in the Southwest.

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